

Simon says... A response to Lysias 3

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Lysias' *Against Simon* introduces us to a seamy side of Athenian life. Here Robin Lane Fox admires Lysias' style and poise, but speculates that Simon would have had quite a lot to say in response.

It is excellent news that Lysias' speech *Against Simon* is coming onto A Level syllabuses. It has fascinated me ever since Lysias' speeches relating to the dreadful Thirty Tyrants were prescribed at school, and when the Lysias texts were distributed, we were told that Speech Three was NOT one to read. Of course we went off and read it at once, and found allegations of sex and violence which were missing from library-books' version of 'daily life in classical Athens'.

Like all Lysias' surviving speeches, Speech Three is so full of half-truths, total lies (surely), implicit values, and social perceptions. It is also superbly well-written by the master of clear Attic prose. I hope the tussle to translate it does not blind his latest readers to the beauty of his style, its concision, its exemplary idioms, its fluency. They are best enjoyed when read aloud or learned by heart and recited. Lysias is the master of Attic Greek at its best, subtler than Xenophon's which has a way of being harder than his 'beginners' reputation might suggest.

Who was Simon?

'Although I am aware of many dreadful things about Simon'.... The speech is against Simon, but there are too many Simons (about 50) among Athenian names for us to identify any one with the prosecutor. The speaker excludes the horsey Simon, the one who wrote a text on horsemanship before Xenophon. Lysias' Simon is presented as fighting as a hoplite in the army (the taxiarch in 3.45), not as a horseman. I do not trust the allegation that he self-assessed himself as having only 250 drachmas of property (3.21), but if he really had been a member of the exclusive cavalry class, surely the speaker would have said some very harsh things about that.

He is addressing the 'council'. It is the revered Areopagus, the council of Athenian ex-magistrates. By, say, c. 392,

the speech's date (3.45), the members would not all be rich or well born, but this is a speech delivered to the body whom we know best in its judicial capacity in the court-room drama of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Visitors to Athens love to stand on the Areopagus hill and relive Aeschylus' scenes. Personally, I relive the Simon case, and leave that rocky outcrop marveling at what the court had heard and had to judge.

The defendant presents the charge against himself as 'premeditated wounding'. The Areopagus is more famous as the court for premeditated murder, but Aristotle (*Constitution of the Athenians* 57.3) tells us that premeditated wounding was a charge heard there too.

Conflicts of values

Attic law-court speeches take on a new life when we read them and keep asking ourselves, 'what would we say, or think, about that assumption or implication nowadays?' Lysias 3 is most intriguing when it discusses the dealings with the desirable boy Theodotus. I doubt if a modern defendant would risk the speaker's admission that it will seem 'senseless' for someone of his age (about 50??) to be in such a state about a boy, but nonetheless, 'it is endemic in all men to feel desire...' (3.4). He gives the impression of confiding in his male hearers when he says, 'the whole truth must be told...' while admitting that he took the young Theodotus off on a sea-journey (3.10). The implication is, 'these dodgy things happen, as we all know, and yes, I admit it ...'. I do not think that Theodotus is a slave, although the speaker claims that he could be tortured for evidence (3.33: citizens could not be tortured). He is presented as a Plataean, probably a citizen nonetheless, and also as a party to 'agreements' involving a down-payment, without any master being mentioned. Pancleon in Lysias 23.5–12 is another supposed

Plataean of uncertain status. I think 'torture' is mentioned by the speaker because he is conscious of describing someone who was 'not a proper Athenian'.

So many artfully-implied values can be picked out, most of which are not ours nowadays. The speaker plays on perceptions that 'decent' well-brought up citizen women should be living modestly in women's rooms away even from the eyes of their male kin (3.6). He makes frequent references to 'shame' as a motive and an accompanying emotion, though he never ascribes it to Simon. These references should remind modern readers that a 'shame culture' had not disappeared from Athenians' values, even long after the Homeric age (3.3, 9, 13 etc.). Translation of the value-words is often enjoyably demanding. A good example is the word *euethes* in the comparative at 3.44. 'Being an active lover', *eran*, is claimed to be the mark of the *euethesteroi*. Stephen Todd's excellent commentary suggests the translation 'relatively respectable'. That seems nearly right but not quite. 'Decidedly ...' best catches the comparative, I think, but decidedly what? Good-natured? Straightforward? Or, more feebly, 'nice'? A translation has to catch the force of *ethos*, character, and the sense that these people are 'good' people. In a famous passage, Thucydides (3.83) uses *euetheia* of 'good' people at a time of civil strife and says that '*gennaion*', 'nobleness of character', surely, not birth, 'has the greatest share in it' (my confident translation of the Greek, but others have disagreed). Here too, a translation of *euetheia* as 'simplicity' is not right. Can one of this year's new readers come up with a better word?

Like so many of Lysias' clients, the speaker claims that he deserves credit and credence for all the services he has undertaken for his city. Unlike other famous speakers in court (Lysias 25.12ff. is classic), he refrains from specifying them and so I doubt the truth of what he claims. I doubt too his allegation that Simon came to a house armed with an *ostrakon*, a potsherd, planning to use it as a murder weapon, but the claim makes us look with new eyes on all those bits of Attic pottery which come yearly out of the ground.

Simon's response

Now, the nub of the matter. Procedurally the case has been preceded by oaths sworn by either party (the *diomosia*, 3.4 etc.). Before the Areopagus, cases for murder and, probably, for wounding, were preceded by two hearings and they then allowed each party not one, but two, speeches. As usual, the prosecutor spoke first. His deposed evidence, on oath, is already known to the defendant. Our speech comes second, but there should be one more speech by each speaker to follow. What would Simon have said next in reply? Here is my suggestion of his first enraged reaction, one which he gave to his own speechwriter of choice (Isaeus? why not?), to turn into the smooth and artful prose which an expert's law-court speech would deploy.

Typical. He went and hired that Syracusan creep, Lysias, to insult me, even though Lysias is over sixty. So much for his hints that he is not very well off. A speech by Lysias costs a fortune. And I mean, 'creep'. Lysias lives with a prostitute, Metaneira, though he also lives with a wife and his elderly mother. He has even paid for her to be initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries (Ps.Dem. 59.21–3). In the next life, she'll certainly need it.

'I cannot BELIEVE the audacity of what he tries to pretend. It is I who am prosecuting HIM, for premeditated murder. HE is trying to con you into thinking I attacked HIM and the case is only about WOUNDING. That back-story about a brawl FOUR years ago is irrelevant INVENTION. The 'witnesses' do not even name me.

Yes, he went off to sea with a rent-boy, but the boy was not my beloved Theodotus. As I deposed in my testimony, I LENT Theodotus 300 dr. for his house-rent, payable to Lysimachus, and as he is such a darling, he repaid it. It was NOT a payment as part of a contract for rough sex with him... As for the brawl, Theodotus kindly offered to take my clothes down to Molon's laundry. The defendant was back from his cruise, frustrated because his own rent-boy had fled. He saw Theodotus and simply grabbed him (I know the feeling...but with me Theodotus wants to be grabbed...). Hence the fight in Molon's laundry. He lost, and two weeks ago he set about trying to murder me with a rusty SWORD (he last fought at Decelea in 411, and even then, his horse promptly went lame... Thuc. 7.27). He wants YOU to believe he

acted in self-defence. In fact, he is a dirty old man...aged at least 50, and never married...the sight of Theodotus was too much for him. Maddened by passion and jealousy, he tried to kill ME.'

I leave you to devise a better draft and to cast a final speech for the prosecutor in suitable court-room prose. Such fights do not only happen in classical Athens. The difference is that even nowadays, defendants do not expect to win sympathy in the Old Bailey by admitting that they came to blows out of 'lust' for a young boy.

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